

Message Text

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SUBJECT: VISA ABOLITION AGREEMENT BETWEEN HUNGARY AND AUSTRIA

1. AS DEPARTMENT AWARE FROM PRESS REPORTS AND FBIS, ON JULY 5 HUNGARIAN FOMIN PUJA AND AUSTRIAN FOMIN PAHR SIGNED IN VIENNA AN AGREEMENT ELIMINATING NONIMMIGRANT VISAS FOR CITIZENS OF BOTH COUNTRIES EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1, 1979. FOLLOWING IS EMBASSY COMMENT.

2. WHILE BOTH COUNTRIES REGARD AGREEMENT AS A SIGNIFICANT STEP FORWARD IN THEIR BILATERAL RELATIONS, AND WHILE HUNGARY MAY CITE AGREEMENT AS PROGRESS UNDER CSCE, IN REALITY, AS REGARDS GOH CONTROL OVER HUNGARIAN CITIZENS' TRAVEL TO AUSTRIA AND THE WEST, NOTHING HAS CHANGED. ALTHOUGH HUNGARIAN PASSPORTS VALID FOR TRAVEL TO THE WEST ARE NOMINALLY VALID FOR FIVE YEARS, IN ORDER
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ACTUALLY TO TRAVEL, HUNGARIANS STILL REQUIRE AN ADDITIONAL EXIT PERMIT FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL TRIP. FOR PRIVATE FAMILY-VISIT OR TOURISM TRAVELERS, RULES RE FREQUENCY OF PERMITTED EXITS REMAIN AS BEFORE: ONCE IN THREE YEARS FOR SELF-FINANCED TRIPS FOR WHICH FOREIGN CURRENCY MAY BE PURCHASED IN THE AMOUNT OF 4000 FORINTS (CA. \$211 AT PRESENT TOURIST EXCHANGE RATE); ONCE EVERY TWO YEARS FOR VISITS TO WESTERN

RELATIVES PAYING FOR TRIP. ELDERLY PERSONS OVER 55 CAN TRAVEL ANNUALLY TO VISIT RELATIVES WHO PAY FOR TRIPS.

3. VISALESS-REGIME AGREEMENT HAS BEEN UNDER NEGOTIATION FOR AT LEAST TWO YEARS. AS OF LAST MIDYEAR, PROGNOSIS WAS AGREEMENT WOULD GO INTO EFFECT JANUARY 1, 1978. WE BELIEVE ADDITIONAL DELAY WAS DUE TO HUNGARIAN APPREHENSION ABOUT BEING INUNDATED BY AUSTRIAN VISITORS TO WESTERN HUNGARY FOR THE PURPOSE OF BUYING UP LESS-EXPENSIVE HUNGARIAN FOOD AND RECEIVING LESS-EXPENSIVE HUNGARIAN SERVICES, INCLUDING DENTISTRY. THE PROBLEMS OF HUNGARY'S BEING ABLE TO ABSORB A GREATLY INCREASED FLOW OF AUSTRIANS ARE REAL. WE BELIEVE, THEREFORE, THAT DECISION TO GO AHEAD WITH AGREEMENT NONE-THELESS WAS A POLITICAL ACT FOR GOH. AGREEMENT ACCORDS WITH DECLARED HUNGARIAN READINESS UNDER CSCE TO ABOLISH VISAS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES (INCLUDING THE U.S.).

4. ONLY OTHER WESTERN COUNTRY WITH WHICH HUNGARY HAS A VISALESS REGIME IS FINLAND. A YEAR AGO MFA CONSULAR DEPARTMENT CHIEF EXPRESSED SOME PRIDE THAT ABOLITION OF VISAS WITH AUSTRIA WOULD BE FIRST SUCH STEP TAKEN BETWEEN A SOCIALIST COUNTRY AND A CONTIGUOUS NONSOCIALIST STATE.

5. IN VIEW OF GREATER NUMBER OF AUSTRIAN TOURISTS WHO ARE EXPECTED TO VISIT HUNGARY, HUNGARIAN PRESS HAS REPORTED AN AGREEMENT CONCLUDED LAST MARCH WHEREBY THE AUSTRIAN KONTROLLBANK WILL ENSURE A CREDIT LIMIT OF ABOUT 4.5 THOUSAND MILLION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SCHILLINGS TO FINANCE AUSTRIAN PARTICIPATION IN TOURIST TRADE INVESTMENTS IN HUNGARY.

6. WE ARE A BIT UNCERTAIN ABOUT THE IMPACT AFTER NEXT JANUARY 1 OF THE NEW AGREEMENT ON AUSTRIAN TRAVEL TO HUNGARY. NOT REQUIRING VISAS WILL NOT OBVIATE LINES AND DELAYS AND CUSTOMS BUREAUCRACY AT BORDER, AND, TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, AUSTRIANS LIKE OTHER WESTERNERS WILL STILL BE REQUIRED TO REGISTER WITH POLICE IF THEIR STAYS IN HUNGARY EXCEED 24 HOURS. ON THE OTHER HAND, ABOLITION OF VISAS COUPLED WITH ABOLITION LAST JANUARY 1 BY HUNGARY OF MANDATORY TOURIST HARD-CURRENCY EXCHANGE REPRESENTS SOMEWHAT MORE THAN COSMETIC PROGRESS.

7. EMBASSY WOULD WELCOME VIENNA'S COMMENTS.

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